

**Testimony of
Barb Fabre**

CEO of Indigenous Visioning
Former director of the White Earth Child Care/Early Childhood Program

In Support Of H.F. 1277

**Minnesota House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee
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Chair and Members, my name is Barb Fabre from Bagley, Minnesota. I'm a member of the White Earth Nation. I am CEO of Indigenous Visioning and the former director of the White Earth Child Care/Early Childhood Program. I also help advocate for early childhood education improvements here at the Capitol.

Unfortunately, I couldn't join this hearing in person, but I wanted to submit this written testimony for the record. I'd also be more than happy to discuss these issues with any of you in person.

I want to express enthusiastic support for H.F. 1277, which would help all of the 31,000 low-income Minnesota children under age five who can't access quality early learning programs.

This funding is desperately needed. For very good reason, there is a lot of concern these days about Minnesota's "child care deserts," or communities experiencing a shortage of quality child care programs. These child care deserts are disproportionately located in Greater Minnesota. This was a serious problem before the pandemic, and it has gotten much worse in the wake of the disruption associated with the worst pandemic in a century. We are facing a crisis.

Over the years I have learned a lot about supporting child care in Greater Minnesota. For more than three decades, I was part of a team that helped bring high-quality early learning programs to the White Earth Indian Reservation. Since then, I have been helping other tribes around the state with this issue.

That's why I am thrilled that this legislation includes an unbelievable over \$500 million total in on-going support for Early Learning Scholarships. If the Minnesota Legislature only invests in one thing, I would suggest Scholarships be the top priority.

The benefits of Scholarships can be felt in all parts of communities. For parents, Scholarships are flexible and portable enough to fit their lives and change their lives. For our most vulnerable children, Scholarships guarantee high-quality programs over multiple years so that they're prepared for school and life. For child care providers who are weighing whether to stay in business or expand, Scholarships immediately generate a predictable new source of customers, which greatly strengthens their financial position.

Earlier I mentioned the 31,000 low-income children per year who can't access quality early learning programs. Imagine the instant boost that empowering those children would give to child care small businesses, the state economy, and our most disadvantaged children. It would make all the difference.

On a related topic, the Legislature also should help more providers access the Parent Aware program, and reward them for their participation. Parent Aware offers any willing child care provider coaches and grants to help them adopt kindergarten-readiness best practices. As you know, Scholarships may only be used at Parent Aware-rated programs where children are benefitting from best practices.

Don't let anyone tell you that only large or urban programs can adopt those Parent Aware best practices. I'll admit that I initially worried about that. But on White Earth, we now have 98% percent of our providers participating. Because we did it on White Earth, I believe it can be done anywhere, particularly if the program's rewards are strengthened.

With a \$17.6 billion state budget surplus, we must at long last take bold action to lift up Minnesota's low-income children and families. The 31,000 low-income children who can't currently access quality early care and education must be at the top of our priority list. Chair and members, thank you for your time and consideration and support for Early Learning Scholarships and Parent Aware. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.